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# Paintings under the microscope; a showcase for the Grim Reaper

Bill

The Providence Journal

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## ART

# Paintings under the microscope; a showcase for the Grim Reaper

Providence galleries are busy this weekend.

Gallery One is showing paintings by Boston artist **Sarah Slavick**. Slavick, who teaches at Holy Cross College in Worcester, specializes in an updated version of the biomorphic abstraction that was popular during the 1940s and '50s. Instead of using the stylized blobs and kidney shapes that were the art world's answer to tail fins and pompadours, Slavick bases her richly colored paintings on actual biological specimens such as cells, tissues, sinews and ganglia.

Typically, she starts with a globby, amoeba-like shape that is then divided into smaller cell-like sections. Each of these sections is divided into smaller sections, culminating in a central point or node that's usually brighter than the surrounding area. Often these points are connected by long, cord-like lines that suggest veins or synapses.

The result is like looking through a microscope at a series of exotic microbes. These microscopic creepy-crawlies, in turn, can be read as visual metaphors, suggesting both community (all those closely packed cells and synapses) and individuality (represented by the cells' central nodes or "points of light"). They may also allude to more specific

## ART WRAPUP

By Bill Van Sicken

issues, such as AIDS and environmental pollution. This would explain why the glowing centers of the cells look so much like votive candles.

The exhibit runs through March 26 at Gallery One, 75 John St. in Providence. Hours are Saturday and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m.

The gallery at AS220 is hosting a new installation by Providence artists **Pat D'Amico** and **William Warren**. Called *Carnival of Souls* and subtitled "an installation of painting & sculpture," it's a sometimes confusing, sometimes moving meditation on the themes of death and mortality.

The show's dialogue with death takes place on several different levels, including references to death and departure in the titles of individual pieces and the use of actual doors and windows in some of the sculptures. In *Doorway*, for example, two halves of an old French window have been converted into a family photo album. Nothing indicates that the photographs depict members of the artists' families, but you read them that way anyway. Other works, such as a mixed-media angel and a

seated figure of Horus, the Egyptian god of the dead, refer to death in a more formal, less personal way.

Apart from the general preoccupation with the Grim Reaper, however, the show offers little to go on. Did someone close to the artists pass away? Or did they suddenly discover a common sense of mortality? Or both? The wide variety of styles, which include bits and pieces of everything from Surrealism to Expressionism to the Pop-influenced sculptures of George Segal, only adds to the confusion. "Carnival of Souls" is obviously about death, but exactly what it wants to say on the subject remains obscure.

The exhibit runs through March 25 at AS220, 115 Empire St. in Providence. Gallery hours are weekdays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m.

The Bannister Gallery at Rhode Island College is hosting an exhibit called "Drawing Conclusions: A Biennial Juried Student Art Exhibition." The 30-plus prints, drawings and other works on paper were selected by New York artist **Robert Birmelin** from a field of more than 150 entries. The competition, which was sponsored by the Rhode Island College Art Club, was open to art students from

New York and New England colleges.

The focus here, which is both surprising and refreshing, is on drawing. At a time when younger artists are routinely criticized for a lack of drawing skills, most of these artists not only know how to draw but have developed their own styles and artistic personalities. Certainly this is true of **Thuy Pham**, whose *Temptations of the Forbidden Fruit* won top honors in the drawing category. A swirling composition in which several large hands seem to erupt out of the background, it shows a high degree of technical skill as well as a lively sense of color and composition. Many professional artists would be happy to draw half as well.

Other highlights include **Doug Fourcier's** dizzying bird's-eye views of La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona and the Parc Olympique in Montreal, and a small self-portrait by **Doren Lindenburg**. (Both Fourcier and Lindenburg, by the way, are RIC students.)

The show runs through March 30 at Bannister Gallery, Rhode Island College, 600 Mount Pleasant Ave. in Providence. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Tuesday and Thursday from 6 to 9 p.m. (Note: The gallery will be open Tuesday and Thursday nights only from March 13-18 due to spring break.)